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New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 13 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/61/298 and A/61/355)

Draft resolutions (A/61/L.35 and A/61/L.36)

Mrs. Núñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation of instability in the Middle East region, characterized by the expansion of the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip, the continued construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory and the complex situation in Lebanon, is a reality affecting not only the region itself, but also the entire international community.

In the occupied Palestinian territory, the toll in human beings killed, injured, displaced, homeless or without access to basic needs is increasing at an alarming rate. The poverty rate is now almost 50 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory, reaching 70 per cent in the Gaza Strip.

Israel continues to build the wall, in flagrant defiance of and disrespect for the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and in violation of General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, which reaffirms the illegality of the construction of the separation wall on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains concerned about the great physical, economic and social devastation brought about by the wall, which is dividing the occupied Palestinian territory into isolated and fenced cantons, destroying entire communities and cutting off East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory. The wall is 42 per cent completed — 336 kilometres have already been built and an additional 102 kilometres are under construction; it will isolate more than 230,000 Palestinians.

The Government of Lebanon has continuously endeavoured to stabilize the situation in its territory after Israel's relentless aggression and its grave violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon. The deployment of the Lebanese army in the southern part of the country and increased cooperation with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in its territory are examples of those efforts.

The Movement reaffirms that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon should be fully respected. The Government of Israel should fulfil its obligations and immediately cease all acts of provocation against Lebanon, including violations of its airspace.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and action taken by Israel, the occupying Power, such as its illegal decision of 14 December 1981, which purports to modify the legal status,

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physical and demographic character and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to impose its jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect.

We also reaffirm that all such measures and actions, including the illegal construction and expansion of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan since 1967, are a clear violation of international law, international agreements and the Charter and decisions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and are a challenge to the will of the international community. The Movement demands that Israel abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms once again its support of the peace process in the Middle East, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and the principle of land for peace.

Likewise, we reject the attempts to modify the mandate of the peace process and the imposition of unilateral measures and strategies aimed at the imposition by Israel, the occupying Power, of an illegal, unilateral solution. The Movement calls once more for a resumption of direct and serious negotiations between the parties, with a view to reaching an overall, just, lasting and peaceful agreement, based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the rules and principles of international law.

Mr. Grönberg (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Serbia, and the EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this declaration.

At the outset, the European Union would like to welcome the agreement between President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza. We regard this as a promising first step on a path towards peace and call upon both parties to adhere strictly to their commitments and avoid hasty action that could jeopardize progress towards a sustained period of calm. The European Union encourages both parties to endeavour to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank.

While welcoming this positive development, the European Union calls on the parties to do more to facilitate the urgent reinvigoration of the peace process. We urge the Palestinians to work towards national unity and to form a government with a platform reflecting the Quartet principles and allowing for early engagement. Such a government of national unity would also be a partner for the international community in supporting the relaunching of the peace process.

We reiterate our call for the immediate release of the abducted Israeli soldier and commend efforts, including those by partners in the region, to that end. We also repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators detained in Israel.

The European Union emphasizes the importance of the implementation by both parties of the Agreement on Movement and Access of November 2005. We also call on Israel to respect previous agreements and to fulfil its obligations under them. We underline the particular importance of regular operations at Gaza crossings, notably Rafah, and call on Israel to do its utmost to ensure that the crossings be opened and remain open.

The European Union remains deeply concerned at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank, as also highlighted in recent reports by the United Nations agencies. We reiterate our call on Israel for the immediate resumption of transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. We encourage donors and others to make full use of the temporary international mechanism.

The European Union reiterates its intention to actively contribute to the work of the Quartet to get the Middle East peace process urgently back on track in order to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the Road Map, relevant Security Council resolutions and the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2005. That should be done in close cooperation with Arab partners. We call for the reinvigoration of efforts to promote progress in the Middle East peace process on all its tracks.

The European Union encourages the parties to continue on the path of direct dialogue and negotiations in the fulfilment of the vision of two States, a safe and secure Israel and a viable, sovereign and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Final status issues, including border issues, have to be agreed by the two parties. The European Union underlines that lasting peace and security in the region can only be ensured by a comprehensive settlement with a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at its core.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): The situation in the Middle East continues to be of great concern for the entire international community. This concern has increased over the past year as a result of continuing negative developments and of the region's further deterioration in many respects. This turn of events has been due mainly to Israeli colonial policies and war crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the expansion of Israeli aggression and terror against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the people of Lebanon during the summer months. Indeed, these events have brought about an intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The core of the problem in the Middle East is, of course, the question of Palestine. It is a question different from any other as a result of the unprecedented injustices that have been inflicted upon an entire people for nearly four decades. Moreover, the continuation of this injustice demonstrates that at least part of the region has not yet fulfilled the goals of national liberation in all its complexities and with all its consequent impacts on social, economic and political development.

This situation, coupled with other factors, such as the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and of parts of Lebanon, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the escalation of tensions and the rise of extremism, gravely affects the maintenance of international peace and security.

The only way to begin to reverse all the ills that we are witnessing in the Middle East is to accept the fact that there can only be a negotiated solution to the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such a settlement must be based on relevant provisions of international law and of United Nations resolutions, particularly those of the Security Council, the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Clearly, adherence to these principles is imperative for the ultimate achievement of such a peace settlement. The Middle East peace process is founded on such principles and resolutions, which must serve as the context within which a solution to this tragic conflict is found. Ignoring the crux of the problem and shelving international law with regard to the conflict itself can only lead to failure.

That leads me to mention one of the most important developments throughout the decades of the Israeli-Arab conflict, namely, the initiative adopted by the Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002, which was reiterated in the Arab Summit held in the Sudan in March of this year. In this regard, the Arab Peace Initiative called for full Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since June 1967, in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and reaffirmed by the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the land for peace principle. Furthermore, the Initiative also called for Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for the establishment of normal relations with Israel in the context of a comprehensive peace.

It is unfortunate, to say the least, that each time the Arab side has extended its hand in peace, it was violently rejected by Israel which continued to unleash its brutal force against the Palestinian people held hostage by its occupation. However, we continue to hope that the occupying Power will respond positively to this historic opportunity by ending its occupation and aggression against the Palestinian people and their land.

I would like now to discuss the question of Jerusalem, which is of utmost importance to the Palestinian people as well as to the Arab nations and to Muslims and Christians all over the world. In this connection, Israel has accelerated its illegal colonization policy and de facto annexation of areas in occupied East Jerusalem by continuing to build and expand illegal settlements as well as by the unlawful construction of its wall.

Israel's intention to proceed with its so called E1 plan is of especially grave concern. This illegal measure will slice the West Bank in half and

effectively hamper the movement of Palestinians, while isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territory. It is clear that such actions are aimed at further undermining the territorial integrity and contiguity of the occupied Palestinian territory and are thus contributing to making the vision of a two-State solution impossible. Without a viable Palestinian territory, there cannot be a two State solution.

Israel has continued to pursue these illegal policies in spite of the absolute prohibition of this type of colonization under the Fourth Geneva Convention and Additional Protocol I, which defines such activity as a war crime, as does the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Israel has carried out these activities in spite of the fact that the Security Council has reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to these activities in 27 resolutions that request the occupying Power to comply with its provisions, some of which specifically request the cessation of settlement activities and consider the annexation of East Jerusalem to be null and void. In that regard, we highly appreciate the decisions by Costa Rica and El Salvador to withdraw their diplomatic missions from Jerusalem, in compliance with Security Council resolution 478 (1980).

Before closing, I wish to reiterate that the international community must commit itself to ending the brutality of the occupying Power against our people. If there is a true desire among the nations of the world to establish peace in the Middle East — and, for that matter, to stabilize international peace and security — it must begin in Palestine.

The ceasefire initiated by the Palestinian side, which has been accepted by Israel, could be a ray of hope in the midst of the despair that the people have been experiencing. The ceasefire, especially if extended to the West Bank, could pave the way for a resumption of peace talks between the two sides. Since the day he was elected as President, and in his capacity as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mahmoud Abbas has been relentless in calling on the Israeli side to engage in final status negotiations. Let us hope that the calls by the other side are genuine and forthcoming.

Adherence by Israel to international law, as well as its compliance with its obligations as an occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention, would prove a step in the right direction. Moreover, Israel should not waste any more time. It should take advantage of the gesture by the Arab countries in the form of the Arab Peace Initiative and withdraw from all Arab territory that it has occupied since June 1967 to allow for the emergence of a just and comprehensive peace. Israel must commit itself to the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and the relevant provisions of international law.

The world should never forget its commitment to putting an end to occupation and colonization. Therefore, the role and the responsibility of the international community remain essential. We trust that the members of the General Assembly will fulfil that role.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Many years have passed since the end of the occupation of many countries that had been subjected to the foreign domination that launched the colonial period, which caused much human suffering and pushed many countries to fight for liberation from the yoke of occupation. Many of those countries were able to achieve their independence beginning in the middle of the last century, overcoming a difficult and painful period in their history. That inspired the United Nations to adopt, on 14 December 1960, the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, on the basis of the right to self-determination, the right of all people to freedom and equality and the belief that all nations, small or large, have equal rights under the Charter of the United Nations.

Yet the Middle East continues to suffer from a long-term occupation. Peoples of the Middle East continue to suffer from the yoke of that occupation and from all manner of humiliation and torture. Although the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism will soon come to an end, there is no glimmer of hope that colonialism will end in the occupied Arab territories. Israel is attempting to entrench its occupation through the use of force and the continuation of its policy of colonization by establishing or expanding settlements.

The Middle East is witnessing a series of events that are being carried out methodically, deliberately and systematically to change its political and geographical character so as to prevent the aspirations of its peoples to progress and stability from being fulfilled. This region, unlike many others, is very important. Its destabilization therefore has a serious

and direct impact not only on the neighbouring regions, but on the entire world.

Indeed, it is regrettable that, since Israel occupied these Arab territories in 1967, four decades have passed without it withdrawing, as required by the relevant Security Council resolutions, so that the peace to which all of us, including the peoples of the region, aspire could be established. That is a source of great dismay and frustration for the region, which is being pushed towards an unknown fate that could be painful for everyone because of Israel's continued prevarication and its refusal to comply with international conventions, resolutions and instruments.

The continuation for more than 39 years of the Arab-Israeli conflict — at the heart of which is the question of Palestine — ensures the instability of the entire region and affects its security. All the countries of the region attach great importance to the question of Palestine, which has a strong and direct impact on the region. The international community bears a particular responsibility towards the Palestinian people and its plight. The use of overwhelming force to subjugate a people has proved futile, and recent events have demonstrated that it is no longer worthwhile.

Israeli invasions have repeatedly swept through Lebanon — in 1978, 1982, 1993 and 1996 — but the most significant Israeli aggression against Lebanon was carried out last summer. Israel embarked on an intense campaign that began on 12 July and continued for 33 days, in which it employed all kinds of sophisticated weapons, including cluster bombs, destroyed Lebanese infrastructure, bombed secure residential areas and killed hundreds of civilians, in flagrant violation of the Lebanese people's human rights, including the right to life. No one was spared — not even the United Nations observers who were killed at Khiam on 23 and 25 July 2006. Qana was the scene of another massacre on 21 July 2006, 10 years after the first massacre at that location, which occurred in 1996 during "Operation Grapes of Wrath", in which Israel imposed an air and sea blockade against Lebanon.

Although international instruments and resolutions prohibit the acquisition of territory by force — including Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV), which stipulates that it is illegal to acquire territories through the threat or use of force — what is occurring in the occupied Syrian Golan shows Israel's expansionist aims, which violate Security Council resolution 497 (1981), in which the Council decided that the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights is null and void and without international legal effect. Council resolution 1322 (2000) calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention, on the protection of civilians in time of war, of 12 August 1949 — an instrument that applies to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

The report of the Economic and Social Council, as contained in document A/61/67, states that the Arab population of the occupied Syrian Golan has been fully integrated in terms of the provision by Israel of legal, administrative and social services. Paragraph 81 of the report states that Israel has applied its educational system on the occupied Syrian territory since 1967, replacing the Syrian curriculum. It has also exploited the water resources of the occupied Golan.

Reports note that Israel's policy of settlement and land confiscation has continued unabated. Forty-four settlements were expanded on the remains of Arab villages that were destroyed by the occupation, in contravention of General Assembly resolution 60/108 of 8 December 2005, in paragraph 3 of which the General Assembly

> "Determines that all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, that purport to alter the character and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan are null and void, constitute a flagrant violation of international law and of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and have no legal effect."

It is important that international efforts be intensified in order to reach a peaceful settlement leading to the promotion of opportunities for peace in the region. That will require political will — but Israel must also be firmly convinced that that is the best option. Lacking that, the vicious cycle of bloodshed and violence in the region will undoubtedly continue forever. A comprehensive settlement will require the full implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

The Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms its belief that a lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict that brings about security and peace for the peoples of the region requires, now more than ever, effective international action to convince Israel to withdraw from all occupied Arab territory and to implement all international resolutions on the issue, as well as the provisions of the Road Map, which calls upon Israel to halt all settlement activities, to dismantle all existing settlements in the West Bank and the occupied Syrian Golan and to destroy the separation wall, which the International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion of 9 July 2004, declared illegal.

Mr. Baum (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland welcomes the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip concluded last weekend by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as the signs of openness shown by both parties to the conflict over the past few days. We are convinced that the ceasefire could form the basis of a whole series of confidence-building measures, thus paving the way for the resumption of political dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Switzerland calls for the extension of the ceasefire to the whole of the occupied Palestinian territory, to be followed by a long-term armistice, so as to initiate a credible political process, supported by the international community.

The ceasefire is still fragile. It is imperative that the parties concerned exercise maximum restraint when faced with violations of its terms. The objective must be to put an end to the escalation of the violence that has characterized recent months — violence whose main victims are Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Switzerland reaffirms that the Fourth Geneva Convention applies to all the territories occupied by Israel. The protection of the civilian population is primarily ensured through respect for law, which binds all the parties to the conflict. The principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution must be observed under all circumstances.

In the short term, the Palestinian Authority must take all necessary measures to put an end to the firing of Qassam rockets into Israeli territory and to re-establish security. Such acts of violence directed against the Israeli civilian population constitute a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and harm the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. In this context, we fully support the efforts of President Abbas to form a Government of National Unity. We call upon all the political groups to overcome their differences and to consider the overall interests of the people living in the occupied Palestinian territory.

To pave the way for a credible political future and to give ongoing diplomatic efforts a chance, Israel must cease all actions that are likely to compromise the establishment of a future Palestinian State. Israel must, in particular, put an end to the construction and expansion of settlements, which violate international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and represent a major obstacle to peace. It is imperative that the territorial unity of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, be respected.

Over the past year, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has continued to deteriorate. The destruction of public and civil infrastructure caused by the military operations has plunged the Palestinian civilian population into a downward spiral of precariousness, poverty and unemployment. The construction of the separation barrier, the continued expansion of settlements and the numerous obstacles to the freedom of movement in the West Bank have led to an increase in humanitarian needs and to the further political, economic and social fragmentation of the people living in the occupied Palestinian territory. In accordance with its obligations as the occupying Power, and in its own interests, Israel must work to revive the Palestinian economy.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is indisputably the central aspect of the Middle East problem, but we should neither forget nor ignore the Lebanese and Syrian dimensions of the crisis — a crisis that has regional ramifications. The status quo is untenable. If the parties to the conflict commit themselves to the path of peace, they must be able to rely on the commitment of the international community to resolving all of the conflicts in the region. Such a settlement must address the fundamental causes of the conflicts, not just their consequences, and must revitalize the peace process. That path involves dialogue with all of the countries and actors concerned. Switzerland stands ready to contribute to the efforts of the international community.

Switzerland vehemently condemns the assassination of the Lebanese Minister of Industry, Pierre Gemayel. This tragedy took place at a very

difficult juncture in Lebanon's political history. We are concerned about the possible repercussions this event could have on the efforts that the legitimate and democratically elected Government of this country is currently undertaking to extend the authority of the State throughout its sovereign territory and to carry out reconstruction work.

Switzerland will continue to support the efforts of the Prime Minister Siniora to re-establish national cohesion and dialogue. It is imperative that all States and parties concerned contribute to the implementation of and compliance with Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). It cannot be denied that certain aspects of this resolution present important challenges. However, everything must be done to consolidate the cessation of hostilities and in this way prevent the people of Lebanon from being subjected to new acts of violence in their territory.

Switzerland welcomes all decisions to support the establishment of an international tribunal. In the difficult phase in which Lebanon currently finds itself, the creation of such a tribunal will send a strong message in support of justice while ending impunity for the perpetrators of crimes, such as the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and those of other Lebanese public figures.

Mr. Zoubi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today to debate agenda item 13, on the situation in the Middle East, and we urgently need to consider practical measures that would allow us to break the stalemate. We are gratified at the signs of relaxation of tension during the last few days and are pleased to see a truce concluded recently between Israel and Palestine. We hope that this effort will result in defusing the crisis and will revive the political process in an effective manner.

The General Assembly, at its tenth emergency special session two weeks ago, adopted resolution ES-10/16, condemning the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip and other acts of violence and destruction aimed at Palestinians. The Assembly called for an immediate cessation of all acts of violence by both sides, including the launching of rockets against Israeli cities. There is an urgent need to stop all acts of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, Lebanon and Iraq.

Here, we wish to reiterate the strong condemnation of the Government of Jordan of the massacres carried out in the brotherly country of Iraq, as well as violence in Lebanon, in particular the killing of Pierre Gemayel and the arbitrary killing of civilians. The territorial integrity of Lebanon and non-interference in its internal affairs must be respected. The sovereignty, territorial integrity, identity and choices of the Iraqi people must be preserved.

Jordan is well aware of the intensity of violence in all its forms and is making all possible efforts to put an end to this phenomenon, which could indeed devastate the region as a whole. We urge all parties involved to work towards dialogue, reconciliation and rapprochement, and to back these efforts through constructive political initiatives. It is incumbent upon the international community to continue to render assistance and provide development programmes which could have a positive impact on the region. Those efforts could make it possible to put an end to the activities of radical elements that seek to undermine security and stability.

The King of Jordan has, on numerous occasions, reaffirmed that the Palestinian problem is at the crux of the Middle East issue. The lack of progress in finding a solution to this problem is a source of instability and a threat to security in the entire region. We call upon the Quartet and the parties involved to ensure respect by the two sides, Palestinian and Israeli, for the truce concluded recently.

There is also a need to strengthen Palestinian security forces deployed in the border areas of Gaza and to provide them with the means to carry out their task properly. We also welcome the efforts of President Mahmoud Abbas, in particular his efforts to achieve national unity in the occupied Palestinian territories. International assistance must also be supplied to the Palestinian side in order to slow the deterioration in the economic and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

A rapid solution to the problem of prisoners and detainees on both sides will contribute to easing tensions and will be a step in the right direction. Israel's opening of access points to the Gaza Strip — and keeping them open — reducing the restrictions imposed on freedom of movement of Palestinians, and paying the tax revenues owed to the Palestinians will all contribute to the restoration of trust and confidence.

The most recent events, particularly the Israeli war against brotherly Lebanon and the resultant destruction and killing, and the disproportionate Israeli

military operations against the Palestinian people, including the continuing incursions in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, once again have clearly demonstrated that there can be no unilateral solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Those events have proven that peace is the only choice. Resorting to unilateral measures will not serve the cause of the region. Justice cannot be built on the ashes of aggression and occupation; it can be achieved only by complying with the provisions of international law and by tackling the root causes of the conflict, putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands on the basis of the principle of land for peace, as well as the restoration of the rights of Palestinians, who have suffered under the yoke of colonization for decades now.

My delegation has addressed in detail the question of illegal Israeli practices in the occupied Arab territories within the framework of the Commission on Israeli Practices. Our delegation will, during the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, address the issue of condemned Israeli settlement policies and the damages resulting from the construction of the separation wall, which Israel still pursues in flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the provisions of the Road Map. The policy of Israeli settlements directly threatens the future of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

The only way to produce a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict hinges on negotiations between the two parties within the framework of a specific timetable that guarantees compliance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). The issue of Palestinian refugees must also be resolved on the basis of the 1948 General Assembly resolution, 194 (III), and the provisions of the Road Map and Arab Peace Initiative. The international community is in agreement regarding the need to establish a just peace based on the principle of land for peace and an independent Palestinian State living side by side with Israel. Here, Israel must show flexibility and move the peace process forward so that negotiations can be resumed. In addition, Israel must adopt practical measures to end the occupation.

Mr. Chidyausiku (Zimbabwe), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We call upon all the parties involved to make reviving the peace process and working towards the establishment of a Palestinian State a high priority. Jordan welcomes the expansion of the membership of the Quartet to include influential regional and international actors. Here, we reiterate our readiness to contribute effectively to the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): My delegation associates itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and of Egypt, who introduced draft resolutions A/61/L.35 and L.36, which Malaysia is sponsoring.

The political and security landscape in the Middle East remains characterized by the damaging consequences of war, conflict and foreign occupation. Indeed, the region is currently at a critical juncture as a result of recent developments, particularly those in the past few days between Israel and Palestine, and those in Lebanon and Iraq. The current situation and the stark realities in the region demand greater attention and support from the international community with a view to assisting the countries in the region to achieve peace and security.

The question of Palestine remains at the heart of regional tensions in the Middle East. At this critical juncture when serious attempts are being made to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, the diplomatic Quartet, with the cooperation of countries in the region, must endeavour to ensure that both sides return immediately to the negotiating table. The Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative are indispensable in this regard. The Road Map must be accepted and implemented by both sides. The Arab Peace Initiative must be seriously considered by Israel. The establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is long overdue. We must do all that we possibly can and seek to ensure that the current momentum towards peace is maintained.

Notwithstanding the imperative need to resume Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, the Syrian and Lebanese tracks must also be reactivated. Israel must realize that its existence as a State in the region is incomplete without genuine peace and friendly relations with the immediate neighbouring States. Peace and a political solution is the only strategic

option for Israel and Arab States alike. For its part, the international community will continue to support efforts towards lasting peace in the region.

The lack of progress on the Israeli-Syrian front is of great concern to all of us. Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan remains a serious violation of international law and a blatant defiance of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Direct negotiations between both sides are vital so that a final settlement can be achieved. My delegation commends the willingness expressed on many occasions by the Syrian Arab Republic to resume negotiations with Israel. It is regrettable that Israel has not reciprocated those offers. We reaffirm our view that peace can be achieved only through the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and full, unrestricted and unconditional withdrawal by Israel from all of the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967.

With regard to Lebanon, my delegation unequivocally condemns the assassination of Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel in Beirut on 21 November 2006. We express deepest sympathy and condolences to the family of Mr. Gemayel and to the people and the Government of Lebanon. We welcome the determination and commitment of the Lebanese Government to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers and sponsors of that and other heinous crimes. We share the concerns expressed by the international community regarding attempts to adversely affect political stability in Lebanon, the efforts by the Lebanese Government to strengthen democracy and extend its authority throughout its territory and the reconstruction process. Malaysia remains committed to supporting Lebanon in its efforts to bring about peace and security in the country.

The situation in Iraq has serious implications for international and regional peace and prosperity. Restoring peace and security expeditiously in Iraq is critical. The Iraqi leadership has the right — and, indeed, the duty and responsibility — to maintain law and order throughout its territory and to achieve the desired political stability in Iraq. The security of Iraq must be the sole responsibility of an independent and sovereign Iraq. In this regard, there is a need for a comprehensive approach, which should incorporate security, governance, economic revitalization, justice and the rule of law in order to achieve true independence and democracy, peace and security.

The Iraqi Government is in a position to set the best course for Iraq and its people. There is also an urgent need for the Iraqi leadership to redouble its efforts — difficult as they may be — to prevail over all perpetrators of acts of violence in the country's territory, be they Iraqis or non-Iraqis, on the basis of applicable national and international law.

There is now a glimmer of hope for the Middle East. We must work collectively to transform that glimmer into a bright shining light of peace, freedom and dignity for all affected peoples in the region. We call on those with the greatest influence to work seriously towards the establishment of enduring peace and security in the Middle East. We call upon Israel to look beyond its immediate security needs — important as they may be — and begin in earnest to engage its Arab neighbours in serious and meaningful dialogue towards the early realization of comprehensive peace. We encourage the Government of Iraq to continue its efforts to assume its full responsibility for the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq.

Mr. Oegroseno (Indonesia): The situation in the Middle East is of tremendous importance to Indonesia. I therefore wish to thank you once again, Sir, for having given me the floor to express our views during the General Assembly's consideration of this agenda item.

Before I continue, I also wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his reports contained in document A/61/298 and A/61/355. The Secretary-General reports what we already know too well: violence has been on the rise during the reporting period due to Israeli military activity, extrajudicial killings of alleged militants, extensive ground operations and tank shelling. Those actions have made life for the Palestinians intolerable.

The report clearly emphasizes that the Israeli Government has failed to implement its obligations under the Road Map to freeze its settlement activities and dismantle outposts constructed in the West Bank since March 2001. On the contrary, the pace of construction of the barrier in the West Bank has been accelerated. The report further describes the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people as a result of Israel's checkpoints and its illegal construction of the wall, which restrict the movement of people and goods, and of its withholding of Palestinian customs and value-added tax payments.

Taken together, those developments have caused the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people to plummet to desperately low levels. Indeed, although the democratic process had been expected to take the Palestinian people forward, it has inflicted on them conditions characterized by deeper poverty and frustration.

In our view, that collective punishment is generating feelings of injustice and persecution among the Palestinians for the simple reason that they have exercised their democratic right. This, indeed, does not help to promote the peace process for the people in the region, as reflected in the continued violence of the succeeding months.

On the issue of Jerusalem, we are gravely concerned about the continuation of the illegal settlement by Israel through the "E1" plan and the construction of the illegal wall in and around Jerusalem, which could prejudge the final status agreement on Jerusalem.

We would also like to reaffirm General Assembly resolution 58/22, entitled "Jerusalem", which calls upon the international community to put pressure on Israel to end its occupation's unilateral measures that alter or purport to change the special status of Jerusalem, and Security Council resolution 478 (1980), which did not recognize Israel's "basic law" on Jerusalem and affirmed that Israeli's decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration of Al-Quds Al-Sharif was illegal and consequently null and void.

On the issue of the Syrian Golan, we would like to reaffirm the absolute need for Israel to end its occupation, as stipulated in the General Assembly resolutions pertaining to the matter, as well as in relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 497 (1981). Following the adoption of that resolution, Israel's decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan remains null and void and without any validity whatsoever. As a result, Israel must, among other things, desist from imposing its citizenship or any form of Israeli identity on the Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Turning to Lebanon, we condemn the killing of Minister Gemayel and extend our heartfelt condolences to the people of Lebanon. On the political situation following the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) of 11 August 2006, we welcome the progress on the ground in the resolution's implementation following the deployment of additional peacekeeping troops. We are pleased that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, to which Indonesia has contributed troops, has begun to fulfil some of its responsibilities, including patrolling the area of operation, monitoring the cessation of hostilities and assisting the Lebanese Armed Forces in the south.

While it is important to ensure the faithful implementation of the ceasefire by both parties to the conflict, we must not lose sight of the importance of channelling humanitarian assistance to the people most affected by the conflict. The two months of violence last summer left hundreds of innocent Lebanese civilians dead, a wholesale devastation of the Lebanese infrastructure and the displacement of millions of people. Thus, we must focus promptly on the reconstruction and rebuilding of the region.

The solution to the conflict in the Middle East, we believe, rests on the land-for-peace formula, with the question of Palestine at its core. Indonesia believes that a just and comprehensive peace in the region cannot be achieved without a just and comprehensive settlement of the issue of Palestine. This is the key to sustainable peace in the area.

To this end, Israel must abandon its aggressive policies and heavy-handed approach to the Palestinian issue and comply with international law, the Geneva Conventions and its obligations under humanitarian law to protect civilians during a period of war. It is also imperative for Israel to withdraw fully from all of its occupied territories in the region.

The modalities are clearly reflected in relevant resolutions of the United Nations. It is thus the obligation of the international community to ensure that Israel abides with those resolutions if we want to witness sustainable peace in the region.

Mr. Al-Jafari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our international Organization is almost a twin sister of the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East because, since its inception, the Organization has adopted hundreds of resolutions in the hope of reaching a just and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict — a solution that would guarantee the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, on Palestinian national soil, within the borders of 4 June 1967.

The international community has realized during the past few decades that there is no doubt or ambiguity that it is Israel which has impeded any attempt to find a solution to the conflict. It insists on following the policies of occupation, aggression, expansion and repression, and it perpetrates the most heinous crimes against humanity in the modern age. Despite all this, we continue to meet here year after year to discuss in detail the serious situation prevailing in the Middle East region, while the region itself is gradually being turned into a powder keg. The situation becomes exacerbated, aggression expands and international law is flouted, while a specific country, supported by major Powers, continues to breach all international laws and international humanitarian law and norms.

Against this backdrop of surprising silence and failure, the international community and its influential mechanisms proudly boast their use of double standards, supporting the aggressor and giving it the necessary cover while mercilessly repressing the attacked victim. The peoples of the region are thus losing their faith in international law as a way of settling armed conflict and fulfilling their aspirations to justice, peace and security.

The noble task that the international community should undertake is basically to direct the present situation along the right path so that it leads to a solution, not to the entrenchment of tension, confrontation and conflict. The truth has to be understood that Israeli occupation of Arab territories forms the basis of the fury and anger that people feel vis-à-vis continued acts of aggression, the latest of which have been the brutal aggression against Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan.

With the prevailing stalemate in the search for a just and comprehensive peace, the present painful reality constitutes a serious and complex danger and is leading towards confrontation rather than peace.

Israel continues its occupation of the Syrian Golan and practices the most heinous forms of injustice and oppression. On the one hand, Israel is plundering the natural resources and the water of the Golan, and is building dams, the latest of which is a sand-mud construction near the city of Quneitra, only 10 metres west of the ceasefire line. By building this dam, Israel is attempting to divert rain and flood waters from the occupied Golan to prevent it from feeding the Yarmouk River, particularly in the Basin of the Raqqad Valley, which is located north-west of Quneitra. In this way, water is being diverted and confined to the occupied area, which is subject to the authority of Israel, the occupying Power, in direct view of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, thus contravening international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions that consider the Syrian Golan to be occupied territory.

We estimate the storage capacity of this dam at 2 million cubic metres of water. Israel continues to work on this dam. Its illegal action is contributing to depriving Syrian farmers in the liberated area of the land from one of the most important sources of water for the irrigation of crops and from drinking water for cattle. The construction of this dam is actually a danger to the population of the city of al-Qunaytirah and neighbouring villages when floods occur.

This action complements Israeli projects designed to plunder the surface and subterranean waters of the Golan. Almost 800 million cubic metres of water are being stolen from the Golan's water supply every year. Israeli exploitation of the waters of the Golan is not limited to supplying Israeli settlements with water for irrigation and drinking. Syrian water is actually being sold and exported by a company named Eden Water Company, owned by Israeli businessmen, which sells Golan mineral water in a variety of containers. Its sales have amounted to almost $80 million.

Israel continues to build more settlements in order to continue its occupation and to further provoke the Syrians. There are now 40 Israeli settlements in the occupied Golan with various names and classifications. Among them are 19 cooperative agricultural settlements, or moshavs, and 15 collective agricultural settlements, or kibbutzes, in addition to about six municipal centres and towns.

The Israeli occupying force continues to bury nuclear waste in the occupied Syrian Golan and to sow landmines. They have planted almost 70 minefields among homes in the Golan. Imagine mines planted in the midst of residential areas. Seventeen children have been martyred and 50 have been injured — having lost their hands, feet or eyes — as a result of playing in gardens mined by these Israeli killing machines. The occupation has turned legal places of residence in the Golan into places of death.

Israeli occupation forces continue to obstruct the efforts of the United Nations to find a solution to this terrible problem. The occupation is trying to impose fait accompli policies to enable these mined lands to be confiscated in the future. The occupation follows this policy in the Syrian Golan and in southern Lebanon. Despite resolutions of international legality on this matter, which consider the occupation and the annexation of the Golan null and void and with no legal impact, successive Israeli Governments deliberately flout these resolutions as they have done with regard to others.

For those reasons, the international community has decided to condemn Israel and its occupation of the lands of others by force, and to exert pressure on it to implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which were adopted 39 and 33 years ago respectively. Those two resolutions have not been implemented because of the blind support by a super Power to the occupying Power, Israel. This matter generates more frustration and despair, and more accumulated hate, as well as the desire for vengeance.

A few days ago the Human Rights Council in Geneva witnessed the adoption of another resolution that condemned Israeli breeches of human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan. This resolution strengthens a veritable arsenal of international resolutions that reject Israel's hostile and occupation policies. Therefore, we call upon members to vote in favour of the draft resolution, entitled "Syrian Golan", in the same spirit, supporting international legality both in Geneva and in New York.

The destructive aggression waged by Israel against Lebanon has led to the destruction of both inhabitants and their habitation, but the steadfast and courageous resistance of the Lebanese and their national unity was enough to defeat the aggressor. Israel continues to flout Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) in an irresponsible manner and threatens the lives of the personnel of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in arrogant defiance of international legality and the credibility of the international legality and the United Nations.

Despite the fact that Syria has announced that it will cooperate in implementing resolution 1701 (2006) and that it has taken the necessary practical measures to do so, as acknowledged by the United Nations itself, a few opportunistic voices with a special agenda are still being heard, both inside and outside this international Organization, in an attempt to cast doubt in an unjust manner on the measures taken by Syria. Syria emphasizes, once again, the independence of Lebanon — its stability, its sovereignty, its national unity and its national reconciliation. We are full of hope that Lebanon will be capable of overcoming the consequences of this aggression so that it will be prosperous and well again, while establishing the best relations with Syria in a manner that serves the interest of both countries and peoples, who have the same history and geography, and who are being separated by those who oppose both countries and both peoples.

Syria has continued to emphasize its readiness to bring about a just and comprehensive peace, stability and security to the Middle East region, through an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories. Syria has declared that its strategic option is to establish a just and comprehensive peace. It has participated in the peace process that began in Madrid on the basis of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

The fact that Syria has adopted a strategy for peace should not be interpreted by some as indicative of weakness, in any form or shape. Among the multiple choices that we have is the will to resist and to liberate our land in case Israel and those who flout the will for peace and withdrawal from our occupied Golan to the border of 5 June 1967 persevere in their rejection of peace.

I would like to conclude my statement with a quotation from President Bashar al-Assad in the Spanish magazine *La Clave*.

> "No country can impose a specific plan on the region, which has a history and culture that is thousands of years old. It is the events and not the power that determines the shape of the region — the opposite leads to conflict. This does not only deal with determining the borders, it also deals with the future itself. Therefore, we should not talk about borders — we should talk about relations among countries, because it is much more important. We should encourage dialogue between countries and cultures of the region. The key is the peace process, for extremism, instability and factional divisions increase in the absence of peace."

Mr. Limeres (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the delegations of Brazil and Argentina with regard to agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East".

A process began 15 years ago at the Madrid Conference that should have culminated in the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the various tracks of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Unfortunately, that objective has proven to be elusive and the efforts made to date have failed to bear fruit. The events of this year in the occupied Palestinian territories, Lebanon and Israel have shown us that delay in achieving a negotiated settlement to the conflict only serves to increase the suffering of the civilian population, mistrust and resentment among the parties. One of the lessons learned in those 15 years has been that the stalemate in the peace process keeps the entire region in a state of instability and that the use of force cannot substitute for a negotiated political settlement. It is increasingly clear that there is no military solution to the conflict.

It is for those reasons that Brazil and Argentina have always believed that confrontation, in the past as well as today, is unsustainable, and that it is urgent to take decisive measures to relaunch the peace process in the Middle East. Although the primary responsibility to negotiate lies with the parties, we believe that the United Nations and the international community should assume a more proactive and effective role.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate that our countries believe it timely to convene an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations aimed at revitalizing the peace process on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the principle of land for peace, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian track, our countries have repeatedly expressed their grave concern over the spiral of violence, revenge and reprisals that has resulted in so much loss of life. We reiterate our condemnation of the military operations that have caused the deaths of innocent civilians, as well as all acts of terrorism and violence. We emphasize that the parties should fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and put and end to the excessive and disproportionate use of force and to attacks against civilians.

Given the crucial need to end the violence, we welcome the ceasefire that has been announced in the Gaza Strip. We hope that it will be sustained and that it will also be extended to the West Bank. We call upon both parties to abide by that commitment and to avoid any measures that could jeopardize it.

We also call upon both parties to make progress in solving the problem of prisoners, as well as for the soonest possible release of the Israeli soldier and the Palestinian ministers and legislators.

We believe that Israeli settlement activity and the construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank must cease immediately.

The humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is also a cause of particular concern for our countries. The international community should urgently take steps to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian population. Israel must also contribute to that end by implementing its obligations in the context of the Agreement on Movement and Access and by transferring the Palestinian tax and custom revenues that have been withheld since the beginning of this year.

Our countries believe that Palestinian institutions should not be allowed to collapse. On the contrary, additional efforts should be made to preserve and strengthen them. We hope that there will be decisive progress on the initiative to establish a Palestinian Government of national unity, in order to promote the political process of internal reconciliation and the normalization of relations with the international community.

With regard to the situation in Lebanon, Brazil and Argentina believe it is positive that the cessation of hostilities established under resolution 1701 (2006) has been maintained in the months since it was finalized. At the same time, we believe that the situation is still fragile and that the parties should fulfil their obligations fully. In particular, Israel must cease its aerial incursions into Lebanese territory, which constitute violations of Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Government of Lebanon, for its part, should ensure that the area south of the Litani River remains free of weapons and that no attacks against Israeli targets occur from there. The Lebanese Government must exercise a monopoly over the use of force throughout its territory. In order for that to occur,

all armed groups should be disarmed as part of a wide-ranging process of political dialogue.

Many other aspects of resolution 1701 (2006) have not yet been implemented. We hope that the Secretary-General will set out specific recommendations regarding some of them.

Given the interconnectedness between the different conflicts in the region, Brazil and Argentina believe that it is important to make progress in the search for a solution on the Syrian-Israeli front, so as to put an end to the occupation of the Golan Heights in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1978).

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the unwavering commitment of Brazil and Argentina to a just, comprehensive and definitive settlement to the Middle East conflict. The resulting peace should include Israel and its Arab neighbours — among them an independent, sovereign, democratic, economically viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized and secure borders.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): Turkey has aligned itself with the statements delivered by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union in connection with agenda items 13 and 14, entitled, respectively, "The situation in the Middle East" and "Question of Palestine". I shall therefore try to be brief in my remarks.

Much has transpired in the Middle East since the deliberations on the same subject matter that took place during the previous session of the General Assembly — unfortunately, to the detriment of the peoples of the region. At that time, we hoped that the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank would facilitate the resumption of the peace process. In the following period, however, the region virtually collapsed into chaos. The Gaza Strip turned into a battleground, and the Palestinians in Gaza were traumatized. The Lebanon conflict resulted in immense human and material losses. Hostage-taking, rocket attacks against innocent civilians and the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force engulfed the region.

The recent events in Palestine and Lebanon have certainly illustrated once again the high stakes in the Middle East. Given the degree of suffering of the peoples of the region, we must recognize that neither military measures nor unilateral moves can provide a lasting remedy to the matters awaiting a just and comprehensive settlement. In that context, we have stated time and again that unless we fully address the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, we will not be able to achieve the desired peace and security in the Middle East.

That leads me to underscore the absolute necessity of a viable political vision for the entire region and its peoples. In that context, we are of the view that the vision of two States living side by side within secure and recognized borders is not a mirage but a realistic goal. In order for that to occur, the parties must fulfil their respective obligations as stipulated by the Quartet Road Map and all the relevant agreements and Security Council resolutions. To achieve this goal, the international community must encourage the parties and facilitate a change in the dynamics on the ground so as to enable them to move from confrontation to cooperation, and thereby to lasting peace.

We welcome the recent agreement between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert on a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Their desire for dialogue and compromise is most timely. We hope both leaders will exert their best efforts to sustain the long-needed calm and quiet in the Gaza Strip. The extension of the ceasefire to the West Bank would certainly further alleviate the tension the ground. We also wish to see the leadership on both sides build on their fresh and constructive approach and engage in a genuine dialogue that will revive the peace process.

With that understanding, I would like to reiterate Turkey's commitment to, and support for, all efforts to resolve the Middle East question. We maintain close contacts with all the parties and we encourage dialogue and cooperation. However, we believe that potential progress on the other tracks of the Middle East Peace process should also be given due consideration as we try to revive the dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. The Syrian and Lebanese tracks await attention and reactivation for the realization of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the entire region. For its part, Turkey stands ready to contribute to international efforts to resume all aspects of the peace process. All the peoples of the Middle East deserve a peaceful, secure and prosperous life in their region.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 13.

It is my understanding that consultations are still ongoing on draft resolutions A/61/L.31 to A/61/L.36. Action on those six draft resolutions is therefore postponed until 10 a.m. tomorrow. in the General Assembly Hall.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.